

Women In Sikhism

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While the women's liberation movement in Europe started around the 18th and 19th centuries, Guru Nanak promoted liberation of women as early as in the 16th century.

In Sikhism, women enjoy freedom of education, worship, studying scriptures, working with men in the fields and other places of work, fighting battles, joining the *Sangat*, congregation, working with men in langar, common kitchen, and more. Women have equal status with men in all spheres of life. Sikhism does not consider women as unequal or impure. She has equal right of worship and baptism.

Guru Nanak Dev said:

"From the woman, man is born; within woman, man is conceived To woman, he is engaged and married.

Woman becomes his friend; through woman, future generations come.

When the woman dies, man seeks another woman; to woman he is bound.

So why call her bad?

From her, kings are born.

From woman, woman is born; without woman, there would be no one at all.

Nanak, without the Woman is One True Lord alone." (SGGS, Page 473)

Sikhism has total faith in the fraternity and equality of human beings, irrespective of caste, creed, colour or sex, and this was based on the fundamental teachings of Guru Nanak Dev, which was followed by successive gurus.



MAI BHAGO, THE FIRST SIKH WOMAN TO TAKE UP ARMS TO FIGHT OPPRESSORS

Guru Amardas and Guru Ramdas encouraged widows to remarry so that they can look forward to a new life. They encouraged women to come forward and promote sacred teachings and gave them the seat of authority as *peerahs*, chair. Guru Hargobind encouraged women to achieve Self-realisation and called women as "the conscience of man".

Guru Gobind Singh made Sikh Khalsa baptism available to both men and women. He also gave women the surname *Kaur* meaning 'princess', that is, the one on whom lies great responsibility. Once a Sikh girl child is born, till her death, she carries the surname of Kaur, implying that she is considering Guru Gobind Singh as her father and Mata Sahib Kaur as the mother. After adding the surname Kaur to her name, a girl would never need to change her surname

even when she is married.

Bibi Nanki, Guru Nanak Dev's sister, played a pivotal role in encouraging Guru Sahib to pursue his lifelong mission. Mata Khivi, wife of Guru Angad Dev, was in charge of langar. Bibi Bhani was the daughter of Guru Amar Das and wife of the fourth Guru, Ram Das and the mother of Guru Arjan Dev. She was an inspiration to strengthen the newly formed religion in the formative years of Sikh history and was the embodiment of dedication, humility and responsibility.

Mata Gujari was the force behind her husband Guru Teg Bahadur and son Guru Gobind Singh. She trained the *sahibzadas* — sons of Guru Gobind Singh — and underwent the most difficult and arduous times in Sikh history. Mata Sahib Kaur was the wife of Guru Gobind Singh who is also called as the spiritual mother of the Sikh faith. She administered the first Sikh baptismal ceremony.

On the military front also, Sikh women portrayed exemplary determination and valour. When Sikhs were persecuted from 1748-1763, Sikh women stood by the side of their men. Thousands of women were tortured and imprisoned, but none of them relinquished their faith despite all the atrocities. Sikh history acknowledges the heroic deeds of the brave Sikh women and the impact of the religious teachings, due to which women could come to the fore and distinguish themselves in service. ■

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